

Grinnell (A. P.)

HISTORY  
OF THE  
MEDICAL DEPARTMENT  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT.  
AN  
INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS  
DELIVERED BEFORE THE  
MEDICAL CLASS,

THURSDAY, MARCH 4th, 1880,

BY

A. P. GRINNELL, M. D.,

Professor of Physiology and Microscopic Anatomy.

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BURLINGTON:  
THE FREE PRESS ASSOCIATION.

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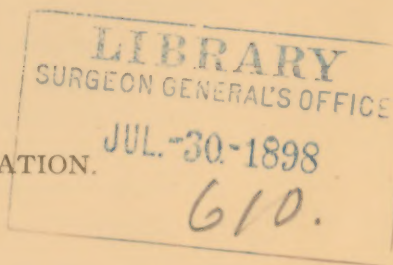
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BURLINGTON, VT., March 18th, 1880.

PROFESSOR GRINNELL:

*Dear Sir:*—At a meeting of the Medical Class, held this day, an unanimous vote was taken to solicit a copy of your Address, delivered at the 27th Annual Opening of the Medical Department of the University of Vermont, for publication.

We, acting in behalf of the Class, present their request.

E. S. HOWE, }  
F. G. MILLS, } Committee.  
C. F. CAMP, }

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BURLINGTON, VT., March 18th, 1880.

*Gentlemen:* In compliance with the request contained in your letter, I submit a copy of the Address for publication. I am

Your Obedient Servant,

A. P. GRINNELL.

*Messrs. Howe, Mills and Camp.*



## INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

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*Mr. President and Gentlemen :*

Agreeable to a mandate of this Faculty, I appear before you to offer an address in opening the Twenty-seventh Course of Lectures in the Medical Department, and bestow a few words of welcome upon this, the largest class of Medical Students ever assembled in this College.

I made every effort possible to be excused from this task, but it has been imposed upon me by a Faculty whose decisions are final and from which there is no appeal. You will better appreciate the position I occupy, when you appear before this august body, at the end of the course, and have them solemnly pronounce judgment upon your fitness to practise the healing art. Should you be so fortunate as to pass the ordeal of their criticism and receive from the hands of our worthy President a certificate of your ability to enter upon professional work, you will doubtless be ready to assert that this Faculty is made up of just and able men ; but if, on the contrary, it should fall to your lot to hear that fatal word *rejected*, you would then consider this Faculty—as I do now—composed of men who are arbitrary in their decisions, unfeeling and unjust in their acts. However much we may speculate upon the justice of their acts, still you must accept the inevitable and I must submit without murmuring.

With your indulgence, then, and in accordance, with their edict, I will briefly review the history of this College, believing that a narration of its birth and subsequent life may be another link to bind you closer to its interests and make you more willing to claim relationship with an institution which has suffered the trials and vicissitudes of childhood, but which now

enjoys the strength and vigor of manhood and that stability and foundation which is awarded to age and experience.

Nearly seventy years ago Burlington was a favorite resort with many young men who were pursuing the study of medicine, and from 1810 to 1823, at which time a medical college was organized and formally opened, a number of medical students gathered here from different portions of the State to receive instructions from Dr. John Pomeroy, a gentleman who was then widely known among the profession as an enthusiast in medicine, and possessing rare and unusual qualities which well fitted him as a teacher and practitioner. The number of students who yearly assembled to pursue their studies under the direction of Dr. Pomeroy became so great that in 1814 he found it necessary to engage more commodious quarters for their accommodation than his office afforded, and a building on Water street, formerly occupied as a store, was secured, and the first regular course of lectures ever given in Burlington upon anatomy and surgery, was in the winter of 1814 delivered by Dr. Pomeroy to a class of twelve students. Other physicians residing in this vicinity were occasionally induced to give instructions in obstetrics and practice. But material was not so plenty then as now, from which professors are made, and he often found himself alone as instructor in several branches of medicine. Still he was found equal to the emergency and in the absence of colleagues he assumed the responsibility of being an entire faculty. His daring as a surgeon was remarkable when we consider the meagre support he received from timid practitioners in this locality, who often refused to share responsibility in critical cases, but left him in sole possession of patients whose life depended upon prompt and skilful action or where delay must result in death. He performed double amputation in the lower third of the femur upon a patient whose condition was most critical at the time and who had been pronounced incurable by associate physicians, only one of those

who had examined the case consenting to be present at the operation, and he, even, refusing to share the responsibility, being simply willing to grace the occasion by his presence. The doctor, however, resolute in his conviction of the feasibility of an operation, decided to do it, and the result fully attested the correctness of his judgment. When we remember that anæsthetics were unknown at this time, that no Esmarch had arisen to prevent hemorrhage, no Lister had furnished an antidote to septic germs, and when we consider the crude instruments and appliances at his disposal for an operation of such magnitude, it is not strange that we should be surprised to learn of his patient's complete recovery.

On one occasion he was summoned to attend a case of laryngitis and found the patient asphyxiated, on a rude bed in the hold of a vessel anchored at the dock. Comprehending the gravity of the situation and in opposition to violent resistance on the part of the friends of the patient, he performed laryngotomy, inserting a quill into the opening, through which his patient peacefully breathed and life was restored. It was the first operation of this nature he had ever seen and had the patient died, lynch-law would doubtless have been employed to prevent in future surgical interference in such cases. In addition to the multitude of his duties as practitioner and teacher, he found time to write upon medical topics and before his death he had completed quite an extensive work on fevers, which, in manuscript form, is now in possession of his son.

While he was thus engaged in the instruction of students, his son, John N. Pomeroy, was pursuing the study of chemistry, and in 1816 we find him engaged to deliver a course of lectures on this branch in connection with his father's course. The son possessed the energy and perseverance so characteristic of the father and while a mere lad he was induced to occupy the position of teacher in chemistry, made vacant by illness of the University Professor. This he did to the satis-



faction of the students, giving sixteen lectures to a class of twelve students. It is well worthy of note that this was the first regular course of lectures upon chemistry given in this country to a medical class. The difficulties he encountered and the obstacles he was compelled to overcome in giving this course of lectures, are amusing and strongly mark the contrast between the teacher of to-day, who has every conceivable appliance, all the chemicals, simple and compound, at his disposal, while Mr. Pomeroy depended upon his own hands for the manufacture of all chemicals and apparatus necessary in such a course. His experiments, which were performed in the old store on Water street began to attract considerable attention, and when it was announced that Mr. Pomeroy at his next lecture would manufacture nitrous oxide gas and administer it to one of the students, the interest in such a performance became general, and the next day a large number of ladies and gentlemen assembled to witness the strange phenomenon of anæsthetizing a human being. At the appointed hour for the administration of the gas, the medical student who had been engaged for the experiment flatly refused to sacrifice his self-possession to the interests of science and Mr. Pomeroy found himself in possession of the gas without a subject upon which to operate. The chagrin and mortification he felt at the prospect of failure in the experiment before an audience of this character, stimulated him to renewed efforts, and after vainly endeavoring to secure one of the audience to assist him, stated to those present: "It was my intention to manufacture and administer the nitrous oxide gas, but my assistants failing to respond, I am compelled to take the gas myself and thus insure success to the experiment." He accordingly laid himself upon a table, directing one of the students to administer the gas until his respiration should indicate the effect, and as the point of anæsthesia was nearly reached, he arose from the table and with an exhibition of muscular power unguided by reason, grasped the timid student who had well-



nigh made the lecture a failure, and forced him under the seats, much to the consternation and dismay of the audience. When quiet had been restored, the remaining few of the audience who possessed sufficient courage to remain, loudly applauded the lecturer and expressed their entire satisfaction at the results of his efforts. Among the persons attracted to this lecture was a young lady, a comparative stranger to Mr. Pomeroy, who soon joined him the journey of life and for over sixty years was a devoted wife and constant companion. Mr. Pomeroy informs me that the success of the lecture might be open to doubt, but the certainty of its results in securing an introduction to the lady who subsequently became his wife, was apparent to any one. So far as I can learn, neither Dr. Pomeroy or John N. Pomeroy ever suffered the annoyance of giving receipts for monies received in compensation for their services. It was considered extravagant on the part of the students to pay and undignified on the part of the Professors to receive; hence the service of teacher was bestowed upon the student as a gratuity. The only remuneration received by Mr. Pomeroy for a course of lectures on chemistry was a back-gammon board, presented by the class at his final lecture, and although the board has been subjected to seventy years of active use, it still possesses youthful attractions and is cherished by Mr. Pomeroy as an invaluable souvenir.

In 1823 the medical department of the U. V. M. was regularly organized with Dr. John Pomeroy as Professor of Surgery, James K. Platt, as Professor of Midwifery, Arthur L. Porter, Professor of Chemistry, Nathan R. Smith, as Professor of Anatomy, and Wm. Paddock, Professor of Practice and Materia Medica. These gentlemen constituted the Medical Faculty for the first year, remaining together only one term, at the end of which changes occurred in most of the chairs. John Bell succeeded N. R. Smith as Professor of Anatomy, remaining but one year, and was followed by Wm. Anderson, who occupied the chair for four years, when Benjamin Lincoln was appointed and continued

as Professor of Anatomy and Surgery, until 1835, when Edward E. Phelps accepted the position, remaining until the extinction of the school in 1836. As many and frequent changes occurred in the other chairs; the Professor of Theory and Practice, Dr. Wm. Sweetser, who remained longer connected with the College than any other individual, was often compelled to lecture upon Obstetrics and Materia Medica, these chairs being frequently vacant and others suffering in like manner, from the difficulty of finding persons to accept the appointments who were acceptable and competent.

The organization continued until 1836, enjoying most of this time a doubtful degree of success, its progress being dependent upon the efforts of one or two individuals who would temporarily inspire the others with a little zeal, only to find the institution approaching apathy again on the retirement of one of its more active members. During the thirteen years of its existence, there were graduated in all 114 students. The largest class receiving the degree of Doctor in Medicine numbered 15 in the year 1825. From 1831 to the close of its career the college continued in a dormant state, the only appearance of life it presented being dependent wholly upon the efforts of Drs. Benjamin Lincoln, Edward E. Phelps and Joseph Marsh, who were unremitting in their labors and upon whose reputation alone the institution relied for its existence. But three or four professors, however able or distinguished, could not sustain the burden usually imposed upon an entire faculty, and naturally enough the institution drooped and died. In the year 1835 no student presented himself for examination and consequently that portion of the University Commencement usually allotted to the Medical Department was passed without recognition. The following year the degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred upon one person, at which time the Faculty resolved to abandon the enterprise, giving as a reason for suspension, "the want of students."

No effort was made to resuscitate or reorganize the College until 1840, when Dr. S. W. Thayer, then a resident of Northfield, Vt., came to Burlington, called upon the President and several of the Professors connected with the University, upon Dr. Hatch and others, and strongly urged their co-operation in reestablishing the College. For some unknown reason he received from these gentlemen no encouragement whatever. Again in the Spring of 1842, Dr. Thayer appeared before the President, several professors and members of the corporation of the University and presented a formal petition for aid on their part to reorganize the Medical School, signed by Gov. Paine, Samuel Drew, Profs. Valentine Mott, Martyn Paine, Granville Patterson and several other gentlemen. This, like the former attempt to obtain assistance from the University, proved of no avail whatever. No action was taken tending to a reorganization of the school by any one interested in the management of the University until 1852, when a letter was addressed to Dr. Thayer signed by President Smith, Rev. John Wheeler and Prof. Benedict, informing him that Dr. Bliss had made proposals to the President and corporation of the U. V. M. to reorganize the Medical Department and that he (Dr. Bliss) would guarantee, after the organization of a Medical Faculty, to purchase the old building that had formerly been used for that purpose, or that he would pay a satisfactory rent for it. Coupled with this information was a request that Dr. Thayer should meet the members of the corporation, who were to take the subject into consideration. He met the gentlemen at the time mentioned in their letter and also at a number of subsequent adjourned meetings. Several vexatious questions arose requiring adjourned meetings for their discussion — such, for example, as that of giving instructions to undergraduates, the payment of \$10 to the President for signing the diplomas given to medical graduates, and others of like character. At last Dr. Bliss's proposals were accepted and Dr. Thayer



was authorized to organize a Medical Faculty and present the names of the several gentlemen whom he might select to fill the respective chairs to the President and corporation for approval. The difficulties surrounding such an undertaking can better be imagined than realized. There were two schools in the state at this time vying with each other for supremacy, and naturally enough they united in opposition to Dr. Thayer's efforts at reorganization of the Medical Department. Still he considered the success and prosperity of a school for medical instruction depended largely upon its connection with a University, and with this idea firmly fixed in his mind, he opened a correspondence with prominent physicians throughout the country, visited many of the schools and importuned a number of gentlemen to join him in the enterprise.

This, like most institutions of learning, obtained success through the indomitable perseverance of a few persons interested in its welfare and upon whose efforts its life and prosperity depended. After several months had been consumed in securing suitable persons to occupy the respective chairs in the College, with trifling hopes of success, as most of the physicians who had been invited discouraged the project and refused to allow their names used in connection with an adventure which promised nothing but failure, Dr. Thayer, still persistent, finally succeeded in securing a few gentlemen who consented to venture their reputations in the establishment of this College. Consequently, on March 30, 1853, the corporation proceeded by ballot and elected the following gentlemen: Samuel W. Thayer, Professor of Surgery; Orrin Smith, Professor of Theory and Practice; Levi Bliss, Professor of Anatomy, and Ezra S. Carr, Professor of Chemistry.

The prospect seemed fair now of completing the organization, when new and unforeseen obstacles presented themselves. Prof. Carr accepted the chair of Chemistry and within one week afterward declined to discharge the obligations unless a fixed

sum should be arranged in compensation. This could not be effected and there then remained but three persons to constitute the Faculty.

With the same persistence and determination which had never deserted Dr. Thayer in the past, he importuned others and this time his efforts were attended with greater success. He applied to Horace Mann of Boston for a competent person to lecture upon Chemistry, and was referred to Prof. Agassiz, the celebrated naturalist, who immediately recommended one of his associates, Mr. Erni, as a gentleman well qualified to fill the place. Prof. Erni consented to accept the position only upon receiving a guarantee from Dr. Thayer that two hundred dollars would be paid for his services. A portion of this sum was contributed by the University in payment of services rendered by Prof. Erni in the Academical Department. As a last resort to fill the chair of Theory and Practice he appealed to Dr. Horatio Nelson of Plattsburgh, who accepted the appointment at once, but before the commencement of lectures informed Dr. Thayer that he would not come unless he could have the chair of Surgery. This change was accepted, Dr. Thayer giving the lectures on Theory and Practice in the first term of the College Course.

After a prospectus had been issued, announcing the inauguration of the Medical Department in February, and before a course of lectures had been formally opened, the Faculty consisted of Horatio Nelson, Professor of Surgery; S. W. Thayer, Professor of Anatomy; Orrin Smith, Professor of Obstetrics, and Henry Erni, Professor of Chemistry. The Faculty was now complete with the exception of one chair, *Materia Medica*; but before the opening of the course in February, 1855, the services of a gentleman then living in Randolph were accepted and Prof. Walter Carpenter was added to the list. Thus the organization of the Medical Department of the U. V. M. was completed. Profs. Thayer and Carpenter could more vividly

portray to your minds the difficulties they encountered in sustaining the College during the first few years of its existence than would be possible for me to imagine.

The Professor of Surgery, Dr. Nelson, failed to put in an appearance during the second course, and by invitation of the class, Prof. Thayer added to his lectures on Anatomy and Physiology, those of Surgery, giving two lectures every day during the entire four months. One of the Faculty, bearing the greater portion of the funds in the treasury, was directed to visit New York and purchase subjects for dissection. This he proceeded to do, although he has never returned to report the result of his mission. Another professor was accused of reading the lectures of a well-known author and the students were in the habit of looking at the book from which the lectures were delivered, occasionally interrupting the professor by informing him that he had left out a word.

Such occurrences naturally tended to demoralize the class, and the dignity of the institution was sustained through these adversities only by the faithful and unremitting labors of three or four members in the Faculty. A room in the University building was engaged in which the first course of lectures was delivered, after which steps were taken to raise money by subscription, holding bazars and fairs to enlarge and improve the edifice now occupied as the Medical College. Many individuals residing in this vicinity gave liberally toward the enterprise—two of the professors, Drs. Thayer and Carpenter, subscribing \$250 each toward the fund. Even the ladies were enlisted in the work of raising money, Mrs. Dr. Thayer superintending a fair or bazar which brought to the treasury \$450.

The College at this time was fortunate in having among its friends such gentlemen as President Smith, Rev. John Wheeler, Henry P. Hickok, Henry Loomis, John N. Pomeroy and others, who bestowed not only their influence but their



money in advancing its interests and establishing for it a foun-  
 hold which has sustained it ever since. Something more than  
 the organization of a faculty is necessary to establish a college  
 upon a basis sufficiently broad to sustain or make it successful.  
 A museum was required to meet the wants of a growing institu-  
 tion, plates, charts and apparatus were needed to illustrate the  
 lectures. As no funds had been provided for the purchase of  
 these requisites, Dr. Thayer came to the rescue and gratui-  
 tously bestowed upon the College his entire collection of  
 specimens, which had required many years in preparation,  
 as a nucleus of a museum. In addition to this, he purchased the  
 anatomical and pathological specimens belonging to Professor  
 Perkins (who for many years lectured upon obstetrics in this  
 College), and this, together with his own, comprise the greater  
 portion of the present museum. He served the College in a  
 most acceptable manner as Dean, Secretary and Professor  
 until 1872, when he was made Emeritus Professor of Anatomy,  
 to be succeeded by Professor William Darling, your present  
 accomplished teacher in this department. Although Dr.  
 Thayer's connection with the Faculty as an active member was  
 severed, still his fidelity to its interests and his efforts at home  
 and abroad to further and promote its welfare have never  
 abated. No Medical Department of the University of Ver-  
 mont would ever have been organized, had it not been for the  
 efforts of Prof. Thayer with the co-operation of President  
 Smith, Rev. John Wheeler and John N. Pomeroy, and I can  
 assert, without fear of contradiction, that no college would have  
 existed through 27 years, had it not been for the energy  
 displayed by these gentlemen in sustaining it. Prof. Carpen-  
 ter has remained with the College from its infancy to the  
 present time, giving lectures upon *Materia Medica* during the  
 first four years and upon Theory and Practice during the  
 subsequent 23 years. Prof. Thayer has frequently assured me  
 that the College, during the earlier years of its existence,

while struggling against adversities would have suffered still greater but for the co-operation and labors of Prof. Carpenter.

Those of us who now participate in the emoluments and honors of an established institution of learning, should not forget to pay respectful homage to Prof. Thayer for his untiring labors in bringing the College into life, and to Prof. Carpenter for his watchful care of its infancy and developing manhood. Others, too, now deceased, who were honored members of the Faculty, deserve from us more than a passing notice. The Alumni of this College will ever hold in kind remembrance the names of Richard C. Stiles, David S. Conant and Alpheus B. Crosby. These gentlemen reflected honor upon the institution, increased the popularity of the College and dignified every class that came under their instruction. Other members of the Faculty who are living and not at present connected with the College are entitled to and shall always receive the highest encomiums from every friend of the College for their instructive labors and co-operation in the past. The lectures of Profs. Collier, Ordonaux, Dunster and Calkins will not soon be forgotten by the students who were fortunate in hearing them. They expended time and talents which have materially extended the influence of the College, and the memory of their efforts to please and instruct the medical classes will be revered by every Alumnus.

It is gratifying to know that the early friends of the college, who are now living, still give it their warmest support; and in addition to them the College has been fortunate in bringing many others into close communion with its interests. I should be recreant to the task imposed upon me to-day did I not express for this Faculty, for this class and for the classes yet to assemble in this College, their acknowledgments to Miss Mary Fletcher for the magnificent Hospital she has bestowed upon this College and upon suffering humanity. By the provisions of her gift the Hospital and College have become

one and inseparable. The College had keenly felt the need for many years of an Hospital where clinical instruction could more largely enter into the curriculum of medical teaching, and this munificent gift of Miss Fletcher's fully meets the requirements, possessing as it does every attraction to the patient and every accommodation to the teacher, with an ampitheatre unequalled as an operating or lecture room.

A great many of the residents of Burlington, too, are entitled to our sincere thanks for their liberal support and assistance, giving as they have during the past year \$2,500 to enlarge and refit the College buildings. Both lecture rooms have been enlarged, giving a seating capacity to each of about two hundred. A two-story addition has been constructed, containing a room for practical instruction in Anatomy, furnished with every modern convenience. A portion of the building is occupied as a Chemical laboratory, adapted to the students' use in chemical investigation. Water and gas have been introduced, and the entire building thoroughly renovated, repainted and made attractive to all of us. *And this has been accomplished by the liberality of the friends of the College who are not connected with its government.*

What can the College offer in return for all these favors received and what can its record exhibit to prove its worthiness? The classes have increased from 9 to 150 students, which gives it a rank of sixth in this country in point of numbers, while its standing for scholarship and influence is equal to any. The diploma from five Medical Schools in this country only are recognized abroad and the Medical Department of the U. V. M. is one of them. From these walls have gone forth to bless and blister mankind 638 graduates. They are scattered to the most remote quarters of the globe, many of them occupying prominent places in our larger cities, many engaged in the Army and Navy, many devoted to their work in country



towns, and all, so far as I know, reflecting credit upon their Alma Mater.

I shall be pardoned for offering a word respecting the present Medical Faculty of which I am an humble member. It is composed of fourteen gentlemen and with one exception only are recognized as leaders in their respective departments. They are devoted to the interests of science and to the advancement of this school. The University President, Mr. Buckham, and the members of the corporation are united with the Faculty in elevating the standard of medical education, and in promoting the welfare of the school.

With such material and moral support the future success of this College is assured.



